



## NO BASES IN EIRE

By M. Grattan O'Leary

**Neither pro-German nor anti-English, Eamon De Valera leads Ireland in her determined stand for neutrality**

**De Valera isn't going to change his mind. That's Mr. O'Leary's conclusion after talking to the Irish premier. Here he tells you why Eire, apprehensive and distressed, clings tenaciously to her precarious neutrality**

**I**T TOOK the good offices of Brendan Bracken, Tipperary man who is Winston Churchill's Minister of Information, to get me on a blacked-out plane from Manchester to Dublin. Next day I found myself examining a bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln and a copy of the American Declaration of Independence in the anteroom of the offices of Eamon De Valera, Taoiseach (Chief) of the neutral state of Eire.

An attendant in an olive-green uniform came through a door and said, "The Taoiseach is awaiting you." I stepped inside to meet a man who was far different from my conception of the traditional Irish rebel against the hated Sassenach.

Eamon De Valera is a tall man with a great frame and powerful physique, and his hair, which I had thought black, is brown, thinning and streaked slightly with gray. His face, deeply lined, is strong but kindly, the nose prominent, the mouth sensitive. His hands, large and powerful, yet with long tapering fingers, tell something of the artist and the poet. As he greeted me quietly with his soft Dublin brogue it was hard to think of him as the erstwhile revolutionary who once pitted dynamite against British guns, heard his own death sentence and languished in dungeons for his country's freedom.

De Valera was due in two hours to make an important speech at the O'Connell Street monument to Parnell; his notes, unfinished, lay before him. "You need not hurry," he said. "As the head of a neutral state I can't talk to you for publication; not about Eire and the war. But I shall be glad to talk to you confidentially, to answer your questions off the record." He was completely friendly.

### **Mr. De Valera Explains**

I put to De Valera scores of questions; questions suggested to me before leaving Canada and the United States, questions suggested to me in England. To all of them he answered quietly, candidly and, I feel certain, with sincerity. He talked of the British and United States request for Irish ports and bases, of the possibility of Ireland being invaded, of the state of the Irish army, of the country's defenses, of his view of



## No Bases in Eire

**Irish army troops (below) probably could not repel a German invasion because they lack the necessary weapons**



the war and its aftermath, of relations between the South and North. Not once did a word of hostility against England pass his lips. He denied vehemently—and with proof to back up his vehemence—tales of tolerated anti-British activities by the Dublin German minister.

I can't quote De Valera. What I can say, on the basis of what he told me, is that while this man is not anti-British, and certainly not anti-American, and most certainly not pro-German, he will not give up Ireland's ports and bases. That the United States is in the war will make no difference. What has been consistently refused London will be as stoutly refused Washington.

Why? Because De Valera feels that the sacrifices involved would be out of all proportion to the value of the contribution. Eire hasn't a modern antiaircraft gun in the entire country. She has no tanks, no antitank guns, no mechanized divisions, no heavy artillery, no air force. When, last summer, a German bomber dropped a single stick of bombs on North Dublin more than seventy houses were demolished and thirty persons killed.

In such circumstances, De Valera argues, Eire's entry into the war, involved in surrender of the bases, would mean wholesale massacre of unprotected civilians in cities like Dublin, Limerick, Cork. On top of that there would come, almost of a certainty, a split in the Eire cabinet and Dail, plus trouble with the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) and all the disunity and chaos and confusion which Hitler seeks to create among people he is fighting. Whether in the event of such things the ports (which are mostly anchorages) and air bases (which would have to be built) could be used within a year, is doubtful.

Whether De Valera may agree at some later stage to hand over his ports and air bases, I could not learn. What I did learn is that it will be a mistake for Americans to assume that he will do so, or be more inclined to do so, now that the United States is in the war. The visits to Dublin of Mr. Wendell Willkie and of Col. William ("Wild Bill") Donovan were not helpful. The reception given De Valera's Defense Minister Aiken in the United States was even less helpful.

Also, unless I misread Dublin opinion, Irish leaders in Eire today are not much moved by those Irish-Americans who keep shouting advice across the Atlantic, and who seem to imagine that the mark of love for Ireland is hatred of the English. The men I met in Dublin have not much in common with "Come Back to Erin" sentimentalists and ink-pot revolutionaries in New York and Boston.

These Irishmen know in their hearts that a Hitler victory would be a loss for Ireland. They know that even if Hitler were to leave Ireland alone and content himself with destruction of the power and wealth of England, there would be desolation for Ireland just the same.



## **No Bases in Eire**

They remember that ninety per cent of all their exports go to England; that a vast part of their savings is invested in British securities; that a collapse of England's banks would bring collapse of Eire's banks; that if the British pound crashes, the Irish pound crashes too. Eire knows, in fact—De Valera is too intelligent not to know—that economically she is tied up with England's life.

## **No Bases for Germany, Either**

De Valera, whatever he may refuse London and Washington (or even Ottawa), will never permit his ports and bases to be used for German attack on England. He gave that understanding when the Chamberlain government surrendered the ports to him in 1938; he has repeated it many times since. I am convinced he will keep his word. Keep it, at any rate, as far as the resistance of Eire's army will permit him to keep it. If German troops attempt to land in Ireland they will be fought. Whether they could be fought successfully by the existing Irish army is another matter.

It is no state secret in Dublin, probably no state secret in London and Washington, that De Valera has tried to get arms from the British and Americans—arms to defend Ireland from invasion. It is equally no state secret that while many of the military leaders of both Britain and the United States were agreeable to giving De Valera what he wanted, the political leaders refused. Churchill and Roosevelt and Beaverbrook probably had their own reasons.

De Valera, I am persuaded, would never use British or American arms against the British. What he wants are arms to meet a feared invasion by the Germans; an invasion that would bring in the British and make a battleground of Eire. And De Valera, I am persuaded further, would not merely meet a German invasion of Eire; he would fight as well if Hitler landed in the North. When last spring the Germans bombed Belfast, De Valera telephoned his Defense Minister at 2 A. M. to clear the highways; that the Dublin fire brigade was going to Belfast. Reminded by his War Minister that this might have some bearing on Eire's neutrality, he said: "Clear the roads; the fire brigade is going." Two hours later the Dublin brigade was in Belfast, saving it from destruction. To De Valera, Ireland is Ireland, north and south, every acre of it.

De Valera, concluding his talk with me, did not ask me to take his word for everything. "I am but the leader of a democracy," he said, "and must be guided by the will of my people. Go out and check the facts for yourself."

## **Some Stories That Aren't True**

I went out and did some checking—checked through British sources in Dublin; talked to Anglo-Irish and Celtic Irish, to Protestants and Catholics, to businessmen and beggars. This is what I found:

It isn't true that the German minister in Dublin has a large staff in his legation and thousands of agents scattered throughout Eire; that he is using them to make Ireland a "back door" through which Hitler can invade England. The German minister—Hempel—has four employees in his Dublin office. He could not have agents throughout Ireland (there is, incidentally, no German population in Ireland) without knowledge of the Irish police. He cannot communicate with Berlin by wireless, mail or cable without his messages passing through British or American channels.

It isn't true that at the demand of the German minister De Valera stopped Irish women knitting for British soldiers, or for Irish soldiers in the British army. There was no such demand; the knitting goes on—and will go on.

It isn't true that the German minister



## **No Bases in Eire**

told De Valera that if he sent the Dublin fire brigade to help Belfast again Germany would bomb Dublin. If Belfast is bombed again and needs Dublin's help, Dublin will send help.

It isn't true that German submarines have used, or are now using, remote Irish harbors and inlets to refuel. This story was investigated by the British government (on the invitation of Mr. De Valera) and found to be groundless. Actually, Eire has no oil except what she imports; cannot import enough for herself.

What else did I find? This: That since the beginning of the war 150,000 young Irishmen from Eire have crossed over to England or North Ireland to join the British army. As the population of Eire is about two and one half per cent of the population of the United States, that is the equivalent of an American volunteer army of roughly 6,000,000 men. That De Valera didn't stop enlistments, and isn't yet stopping them, is significant, to say the least. Actually, there is hardly a family in Eire that hasn't a relative with the British armed forces or at work in munitions factories in England.

These people, still proud of the old Munsters and Dublins and Connaught Rangers that once were so much a part of the British military story, smile at the suggestion that Eire's official neutrality is born of cowardice. They point to Garland, the first V.C. of the R.A.F. in this war, a Celtic Irish boy from Dublin; point to Captain Fogarty Fegan of the Jervis Bay; point to one of the current heroes of the R.A.F., Flight Lieutenant "Paddy" Finucane of Eire.

And Eire, her support of De Valera notwithstanding, knows that war shadows stretch nearer to her, knows as well that the Battle of the Atlantic already means much to her. Her tea, coffee, gasoline and tobacco are severely rationed. She lives today on black bread. Her people, without coal, are forced to burn peat, or (as in Dublin) wood at \$15 a ton. She knows that Irishmen are cold this winter; that there is hardship in Dublin and Cork and Galway and in her villages and glens.

Eire still has a favorable trade balance. But that balance is being steadily whittled down. Industries can't import raw materials; there is a consequent scarcity of goods to sell and export; and a further consequence of unemployment, and, on top of all, a growing cost of living.

## **Feels Effects of the War**

Dublin, its traditional gaiety in dejection notwithstanding, feels the hand of war. On famed O'Connell Street, down past the monuments to Parnell and O'Connell and Goldsmith and other Irish heroes, sandbags are piled against public buildings, and there are signs to air-raid shelters and posted instructions about air-raid precautions. In the courtyard of Trinity College, students drill through most of the day, and at the National University there are officers' training classes, and green-clad soldiers of Eire stand guard on Dublin's quays and at government offices and the Parliament buildings and before the Bank of Ireland on renowned College Green.

At night, too, Dublin is partially blacked out; partly because there is a scarcity of power, but partly also because a lighted Dublin provides direction for German fliers in bombing raids on England. Coal is so scarce that homes and hotels no longer burn it, and Eire's railways (still owned by British capital) no longer run on time because they must burn the slack from British mines, all that is now available to them. There is still plenty of basic food, black bread and butter and cream and cheese and meat, but a sharp scarcity of tea and coffee and cigarettes and matches and of all luxuries. Dublin women, like



## **No Bases in Eire**

the women of Britain, have gone back to cotton and woolen stockings, and the shops of Grafton Street, which is Dublin's Regent Street, present forlorn, empty windows.

At night Dubliners still crowd their theaters, and queues still stand before the Gate and the Abbey, homes of the drama which still outdraw the cinema. But they are far from prosperous-looking crowds; and in the outskirts of the city one meets more than ever those besawled, furtive old women who tell of Dublin's misery.

Thus the Battle of the Atlantic—neutrality or no neutrality—is Eire's battle, too. They don't talk much about it in Dublin; don't mention, for example, that when the first of Eire's four cargo ships sailed to the United States for wheat it sailed in a British convoy. One reason for the lack of talk is the censorship of the press and radio and cinema.

At the same time, it isn't true that Irish newspapers are compelled to put Berlin's High Command communiqués before British official statements. In Dublin the Irish Times (an Anglo-Irish newspaper that supports De Valera's neutrality policy) and the Independent and Irish Press (the last the government organ) carry war news pretty much as United States newspapers carry it. Two of them carry Reuter's news service, which is hardly anti-British.

What of the I.R.A.? The I.R.A. is a far cry from the old Sinn Fein force that numbered among its leaders intrepid fighters like Michael Collins and Arthur Griffiths and "Dick" Mulcahy and De Valera. It has no outstanding chiefs (most of them, with about 800 of their followers, have been interned) and for the most part is made up of young men barely known outside their own circle. That the I.R.A. would cause trouble for De Valera in the event of neutrality being abandoned can hardly be doubted. To suggest that it represents any wide section of the people of Eire is to suggest nonsense.

There remains Northeast Ulster; the old eternal question of the North and South. In Orange Belfast, in most of the six Ulster counties still under the British flag, the Battle of the Boyne is much more real than the Battle of the Somme; just as in the South, Irishmen still talk of Cromwell and Castlereagh as though they were Mr. Churchill's colleagues. Yet these long memories, a seeming inability of Irishmen to forget, are not the only source of the North-South difficulty. There are economics: the fear of Scotch-Irish Ulstermen that in an Irish Parliament, without partition to protect them, their industries would be swamped.

Socially, apart from politics, the North and South get on famously. The Dublin football club goes up to Belfast and plays before great crowds, and the Belfast team comes down to Dublin and plays before greater crowds. And one night in Dublin I watched the men and women of Belfast, up for the Curragh races, mingle gaily with their southern neighbors in the rotunda of the Shelburne. Yet — politically — nothing happens. Partition remains.

De Valera talked to me at length on this North and South problem. He does not admit that the Northeast Ulster government is an Irish government; points to British control over its customs, income tax and post office as proof that it is a British government—a bit of England still in Ireland. To De Valera this British foothold in Ulster is the chief source of continued difficulty between Ireland and England. He will not admit there is a religious problem, nor that there could be one in a united Ireland.

## **Union Without Coercion**

To support his claim, De Valera points to the fact that Catholic Eire has a Protestant president (Dr. Douglas



## **No Bases in Eire**

Hyde); that of five members of Eire's supreme court, two are Protestants; that Protestants are appointed to the Senate, elected to the Dail and promoted in the civil service out of all proportion to their numbers. In a united Ireland Parliament, he argues, Northern Protestants could continue to control their own education and would have ample protection for their legislative interests under proportional representation. But De Valera, for all his passionate feeling that Northeast Ulster should be a part of Eire, will never try to coerce the six counties into union. Union, he says, will come in time.

Perhaps he is right. Whether he is right or wrong, one thing is sure. It is that the end of the English-Irish grudge will not be hastened by interference from outsiders. Americans and Canadians don't understand Ireland or the Irish. They don't understand the people who, while remembering Cromwell and "Bloody Balfour" and jealous of their independence from England, still keep a great monument to Queen Victoria in the rotunda of their Parliament.

As I stepped into the Dublin plane that was to take me back to England I carried with me four convictions: Eamon De Valera will not give up Eire's bases. He will fight Hitler if Hitler attempts to invade Ireland. He will never fight the English. He will give up his bases least of all at the behest of Washington.

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